

Washington D.C. - U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop says a number of crucial education and health care programs are severely under-funded in an appropriations bill narrowly passed by the House of Representatives.

“This bill has to be a bitter disappointment to millions of Americans who were led to believe Congress would do much more this year to help strengthen schools and provide for health care needs in our communities,” the Second District Congressman said. “When education receives \$8 billion less than authorized, and Community Health Centers get the smallest percentage increase in six years, the progress in meeting human resources needs that was promised by many members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle, is just not kept.”

By a vote of 215 to 208, the House passed the Labor-Health and Human Resources-Education Appropriations Bill Thursday (7/10) for the new fiscal year starting October 1. The measure now goes to the Senate. Although much of the bill’s funding is automatically set by formulas established by law, including Medicaid and Medicare, the appropriation levels for a wide range of human resource programs are set at the discretion of Congress. The House-passed bill increases discretionary spending for Labor-HHS-Education programs from \$134.7 billion to \$138.4 billion, barely keeping pace with inflation, he noted.

Representative Bishop, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, sought to improve the bill by backing an amendment that would have added \$5.5 billion by reducing this year’s average tax cut for people earning more than \$1 million from \$88,326 to \$60,000. However, the proposal was ruled out of order.

As a result, he said, the bill falls drastically short in many respects.

Among the programs funded in the bill is the landmark “No Child Left Behind Act,” which established financial assistance and procedures to help schools throughout the country strengthen their academic performance, the Congressman pointed out. However, he said, the bill provides billions of dollars less than the Act authorizes, including \$583 million less for Impact Aid to assist schools serving military-connected families; \$50 million less for teacher training; and \$750 million less for after-school programs. He said the bill also falls short in a number of other areas, including a cut in low-income energy assistance at a time when heating bills are rapidly increasing; a freeze on Maternal and Child Health Block Grants; the smallest increase in 15 years for medical research at the National Institutes of Health, and a freeze on the maximum amount a student can receive under the Pell Grant Program that enables many disadvantaged students to attend college, even though tuitions are rising.

These programs profoundly affect the lives of millions of people right now, and will have a big impact on the country’s future, Representative Bishop said. He added that he hoped the bill would be improved as it moves through the Senate and through a joint House-Senate conference committee, where it would go to resolve any differences between the two houses of Congress.

“We can, and must, do better,” he said.